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A PLAN FOR TRAINING TEACHERS WHILE IN SERVICE

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The training of teachers for rural schools has become a vexing problem. Many states are attempting to solve it by the establishment of county training classes and special courses in high schools. Teachers prepared in these ways, however, must lack the inspiration which comes from attendance at a good normal school, and they can have but few opportunities to secure practice.

A unique system for training teachers while in service has been developed in the country schools of Connecticut. All new teachers are considered as apprentices. Their apprenticeship has been organized and made to count toward sound training much as is the practice in many large industrial concerns of today. Only in this way can adequate practice be secured. The adjustment between theory and practice can also be kept reasonably constant.

By a law passed some years ago, towns having fewer than twenty teachers may secure on application to the state board of education the services of a supervisor to direct their schools. The supervisors assigned to this duty are engaged and paid by the state. According to the terms of their contract they must give two hours of instruction each month to all teachers in their district and must visit all schools at least twice during the same period. Although a supervisor may be assigned to the management of schools in several small towns, the total number of teachers in his territory is seldom allowed to exceed thirty-five, in order that he may have ample time to make the necessary visits to schools and meet with the teachers of each town monthly.

A certain amount of training is gained by teachers under any system of careful supervision, but in order that their development may be made surer there must be opportunities for the observation of good teaching as well as for practice. To supply this need a law was passed by the last legislature providing for the establish-

ment of model schools in the small towns to be used as adjuncts to the system of training through supervision outlined above. A copy of this law follows.

TRAINING OF TEACHERS

CHAPTER 277

SECTION 1. One school in each town having twenty teachers or less may be organized as a model school for observation and instruction of the training class conducted by the supervisor.

SEC. 2. The state board of education may make application to the comptroller for an order on the treasurer for a sum not exceeding three dollars a week for each teacher in such model schools. No application shall be made to the comptroller under the provisions of this act unless the town in which said model school is located shall pay to the teacher of the model school a wage of not less than ten dollars a week or not less than the wage which was paid for teaching in said school during the previous year.

The assistance thus offered makes possible the placing of a strong teacher in every small town. The use of model schools for observation purposes enables young teachers in the most remote rural districts to see excellent teaching and through imitation acquire correct methods in their own work.

The approval of a school as a model is made only after a careful inspection by an agent of the state board of education. Even after approval the school is visited at intervals by an inspector to note its use for training purposes as well as to see that the desired standards of teaching are being maintained. The requirements for approval of a school as a model are here given:

The rural model school should be a one-room school in a situation accessible to all teachers of the town.

The building must be in good repair with sufficient blackboard space.

There must be ample equipment of aids to teaching, including a hektograph and a complete set of wall maps.

There must be a suitable selection of supplementary reading—at least fifteen sets.

There should be not less than fifteen pupils registered and five grades represented to include one first grade and at least one grade above the fifth.

The teacher must be able to secure results with well-defined and approved methods.

She must have a good program and keep a book of lesson plans.

She must prepare in some detail one model lesson outline each week for the instruction of visiting teachers.

She is to consider herself as an assistant to the supervisor and be prepared at all times to consult with him relative to the needs of teachers sent to observe her work.

During the present year forty-two towns have applied for the establishment of model schools. Twenty-five schools have been approved thus far. The schools already approved serve a territory employing 227 teachers, all of whom have enjoyed the benefits of observation in them and conferences with their teachers.

Some suggestions issued for the guidance of supervisors in the use of model schools are given below. New plans are being worked out continually, and it is hoped that still wider possibilities for the use of these schools will be developed the coming year when the system has become more widely established.

The supervisor shall interpret the course of study and determine the methods to be used in the school.

He shall confer frequently with the model-school teacher and send other teachers to her school for observation and instruction. He shall conduct teachers' meetings in the model school and have frequent demonstration lessons with classes of children at such meetings. Teachers sent to observe shall be given definite points to consider on which they are required to report.

Work by pupils of the model school shall be frequently sent to other schools of the town.

When new charts, seat-work devices, etc., are introduced, the model teacher will prepare samples for distribution to other schools.

The close correlation between the semi-monthly visits of the supervisor, the monthly meetings with all teachers, the observations at the local model school, and the daily practice in her own school rapidly develop the young teacher so that she soon acquires confidence and some real skill. Scores of Connecticut young women are now being prepared in this way for successful service as teachers. This is being done, too, while they are actually earning a livelihood during the apprenticeship. Through the correspondence courses with the Willimantic and Danbury normal schools and the Danbury summer normal classes other opportunities for improvement are offered.

This plan for the preparation of teachers for rural schools is working so successfully that it is believed its essential principles can be applied in any school system where there is intelligent super-

vision. An organization of the daily activities of a beginner so that the work becomes educative and leads to real improvement of the worker is coming to be recognized as furnishing a very economical and satisfactory means for vocational training. It is now being demonstrated that this principle can be used to advantage in training beginners in the vocation of teaching and even in improving those long in the service.